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**GIVE THE GIFT OF LOVE & PEACE;
DIAL H-O-P-E THIS HOLIDAY SEASON,
BREAK THE CYCLE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE!**

***SAN DIEGO FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER
READY TO DEAL WITH INCREASE IN CALLS DURING HOLIDAYS***

San Diego, CA: Families can give the gift of love and peace this Holiday Season. They can break the cycle of family violence by dialing for H-O-P-E. It is the San Diego Family Justice Center's new toll free information line, 1-866-933-H-O-P-E. Trained professionals will provide families with information to end the abuse, protect themselves, and mend their families. "The holidays can be a stressful time of the year for anyone and even more so for families struggling with domestic violence at home," said San Diego City Attorney Casey Gwinn. "Victims often wait to call for help until after the holidays are over. But now they can dial our H-O-P-E line and get the help and services they need right now."

When victims call the Family Justice Center's HOPE line, they will be referred to trained professionals who can assist victims with direct services: advocates who can obtain counseling and explain the legal process; detectives who can take new reports and conduct follow-up investigations; civil attorneys who can help victims secure stay away orders, child custody and supervised visitation orders; professionals who can help with food vouchers, transportation and assist with emergency shelter and so much more. "We know that domestic violence doesn't take time off for the holidays, said Assistant City Attorney Gael Strack. "We have an army of professionals who are eager to help. Victims can make that call, or walk into the Family Justice Center."

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After office hours, operators will answer calls and refer the messages to the Family

Justice Center for action the next business day. A voice mail system is also in place, and all H-O-P-E line calls will be returned in order of priority.

The need for the Family Justice Center was felt the very day it opened as six different families found their way to the new downtown facility, seeking restraining orders, military family intervention, food and shelter. These families took the first steps towards safety by rushing to the Center after hearing and watching television and radio reports about the new facility which opened October 10 of this year. Since then, more than 500 people have walked in, and more than 3,000 have called to seek help and/or information.

The Family Justice Center is the most comprehensive "one stop shop" ever built in America to serve victims of family violence. It is the first program in the nation to offer in one location:

- 1) an entire Police Department's Domestic Violence Unit (40 staff members).
- 2) a City Attorney's entire Domestic Violence Prosecutorial Unit (32 staff members),
- 3) a Forensic Medical Unit to document, evaluate and treat injuries, and
- 4) over thirty (30) community partners and governmental agencies, either on-site or off-site.

Among the community partners on-site: Center for Community Solutions, Fire Department's Chaplain program, County's Probation Department, San Diego Domestic Violence Council, San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, Military Family Advocate, Traveler's Aid, and YWCA shelter services.

Since the Family Justice Center opened numerous political and community leaders have visited and toured the site: California Attorney General Bill Lockyer; California Senator Dede Alpert; California Assembly member Juan Vargas; Diane Stuart, Director of the Office of the Violence

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Against Women; U.S. Representatives Susan Davis and Ellen Tauscher; Judge Ronald Adrine, Cleveland, Ohio; and representatives from the Republic of Albania, Ghana,

Japan, United Kingdom, Sweden and Australia.

The Forensic Medical Unit is operated by Grossmont Hospital Sharp HealthCare and will be in operation beginning February 2003. For the first time, victims with non-life threatening injuries will have access to a Center that includes a medical unit that will immediately be able to document, evaluate and treat injuries. Initially, the Forensic Medical Unit will be staffed with a part time medical director, a full-time nurse practitioner, and a full time forensic evidence specialist.

The San Diego Family Justice Center is the vision of San Diego City Attorney Casey Gwinn.

In 1988, as a deputy city attorney, Gwinn developed and headed the Domestic Violence Unit. The following year, he wrote the proposal to create the San Diego Family Justice Center. In 1996 Gwinn was elected City Attorney and continued to pursue the dream. In 1999, David Bejarano was appointed Chief of the San Diego Police Department and embraced Gwinn's vision. Then, in March 2002, The California Endowment awarded the city \$500,000 and challenged San Diego to build the Family Justice Center. The following month the Mayor and the San Diego City Council accepted the challenge and approved the financial plans to create the San Diego Family Justice—where families come first!

There are two phases to the Family Justice Center. Phase one seeks \$3-million to sustain the project for four years at 707 Broadway in downtown San Diego. The facility is 27,000 square feet spread out over three floors. The ultimate dream is a permanent site with regional centers throughout the county which will allow the expansion of community and governmental services. A capital building campaign was kicked off in October to raise \$10 million. For more information contact [www:familyjusticecenter.org](http://www.familyjusticecenter.org) ###